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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 001112

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE
(HOH/FOOKS/STINCHOMB), S/WCI (WILLIAMSON AND LAVINE); OSD
FOR BEIN

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA-SDA MAKES LAST MINUTE SREBRENICA SWITCH

REF: A. SARAJEVO 1056

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 816

Classified By: A/DCM Michael Murphy. Reason 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On July 7, the deadline for registering candidates for the October 2008 municipal elections, the Party for Democratic Action (SDA) submitted Osman Suljic to be its candidate for the Srebrenica mayoral race. Following several days of discussions with SDA leadership, SDA President Tihic was convinced that nominating Camil Durakovic would damage relations between the United States and SDA. SDA's decision to find a candidate other than Durakovic is welcome, but we know little about Suljic other than that he was the wartime president of Srebrenica. Suljic move to the Tuzla area after the war, and he has been less involved in politics since then despite maintaining his connections with SDA. END SUMMARY.

SDA Initially Chooses Durakovic Despite Opposition

[1](#)2. (C) On June 19, the 24-member SDA Presidency decided to nominate Camil Durakovic as the SDA candidate for the Srebrenica mayoral race (Ref A). As the public face of the 2007 Srebrenica secessionist movement and primary organizer of the Sarajevo tent settlement, Durakovic is a controversial figure both for Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs in Srebrenica. While SDA justified its decision by pointing to Durakovic's lack of a wartime past, English language skills, and educational background, criticism of the decision came quickly from both Srebrenica residents and some in the international community. The Ambassador spoke to Tihic on June 20 to convey our grave disappointment over the decision and to urge him to reconsider. Despite the public and private opposition to Durakovic voiced by us and others, Tihic and SDA held firm in their support of Durakovic.

Push for SDA to Reconsider

[1](#)3. (C) In the weeks following the June 19 SDA decision, we, along with OHR Special Envoy Bond, worked to convince the SDA leadership that Durakovic was an inappropriate candidate, and that a new candidate must be found before July 7, the deadline for registering candidates with the Central Election Commission. Public and press criticism of Tihic and SDA mounted over this period and reached a high-pitched crescendo over the July 4 weekend. Nine of 15 members of SDA's Srebrenica Executive Board released an open letter to Tihic underscoring their unhappiness with Durakovic and complaining that his nomination had violated internal party rules, which

Dnevni Avaz, the country's largest circulation daily, featured prominently in its July 5 addition.

14. (C) On Monday, July 7 the Ambassador called Tihic to again express our deep disappointment with SDA's decision and warn him that the US would consider the nomination of Durakovic a betrayal by SDA after the U.S. effort to secure for 1991 Srebrenica residents the right to vote in that municipality in October (Ref B). The Ambassador noted that Durakovic's support came only from two members of SDA in Srebrenica--Sadik Ahmetovic and Sefket Hafizovic--and suggested that they supported his candidacy for their own personal interests. The Ambassador told Tihic that SDA could support either the personal interests of those two people or it could support the people of Srebrenica, with whom the US stands. Tihic argued that he only became involved in the candidate selection process after Durakovic's name had passed through SDA's procedures and came up for consideration at the SDA presidency. Tihic stressed that Durakovic was one of the only candidates that fit SDA's criteria that the next mayor of Srebrenica live in Srebrenica. Tihic claimed there was not enough time to take a new decision given the required procedures in SDA.

SDA Nominates Osman Suljic

15. (C) Later in the day on July 7, after hearing from SDA's Mirsad Kebo that Tihic was considering different options, Tihic called to tell the Ambassador that SDA had accepted that Durakovic could not be the Srebrenica candidate and had

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decided to nominate Osman Suljic. Tihic described him as an experienced and talented manager, someone who could not be easily manipulated, someone known by citizens of Srebrenica, and someone who could unite all citizens. Suljic, originally from Srebrenica but now living in Tuzla, is a mining engineer and has served as the technical director of a bauxite mine and as a professor at a high school. Suljic was the wartime president of Srebrenica and notably appealed on July 9, 1995 for help in advance of the fall of Srebrenica. We have heard from some within SDA that he was not close to Naser Oric or his supporters during the war though we cannot vouch for the accuracy of that information. We expect to hear more about Suljic later this week during events for the July 11 Srebrenica commemoration.

And Links Decision to US Pressure

16. (SBU) The last minute decision to nominate Suljic over Durakovic was the leading news story in the Federation on July 8. Tihic appeared in several papers and on Federation TV (FTV) to discuss the decision. When asked by FTV who was pressuring SDA to nominate someone other than Durakovic, Tihic said he did not want to discuss details but that after consultations with Srebrenica citizens, the Mothers associations, and the diplomatic corps, SDA concluded that Durakovic was not the best candidate for Srebrenica. In a follow-up question, Tihic said it would be hard to move forward in Srebrenica without the strong support of the international community and the United States. SDA's Secretary General Amir Zukic stated that Durakovic was out because of an ultimatum from the American administration and that SDA withdrew Durakovic because it did not want to lose US support and sacrifice Srebrenica.

Comment

17. (C) While we still do not have a good picture of who Osman Suljic is or what his prospects are for winning the election and governing effectively, the last minute decision by SDA to drop its support of Durakovic is welcome. Durakovic would have been a polarizing figure from day one because of his

involvement in the 2007 secessionist movement. Some commentators, both on the Bosniak and Bosnian Serb side, even speculated that the Bosniaks would lose the mayoralty if they put forward Durakovic. It is still unclear if Bosniaks will be able to muster enough support for Suljic to win, even with the provisions to allow 1991 residents of Srebrenica to vote in the elections. End comment

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